

TRAINER'S COMPANION MANUAL

SERVING TODDLERS

Sharing Knowledge with Infant –Toddler Teachers and Home Visitors



Sharing Knowledge with Infant – Toddler Teachers and Home Visitors Series

This booklet describes development, use of language and awareness of others for toddlers from 16 to 36 months, and may be used by Staff members who are working with teachers and home visitors. The document was developed by the Early Head Start National Resource Center (EHS NRC) @ ZERO TO THREE in collaboration with the Office of Head Start.

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Introduction

The Sharing Knowledge with Infant-Toddler Teachers and Home Visitors Series for Early Head Start (EHS) and Migrant and Seasonal Head Start (MSHS) presents basic information on child development, working with families, and the comprehensive services offered by EHS and MSHS. The *Trainer's Companion Manual* provides background material and suggested activities to be used by a supervisor or director in supporting the use of these modules by teaching and home visiting staff members, individually or in groups. These modules may be used during an orientation period to provide an overview of basic information on serving infants and toddlers and their families, provided as part of in-service training, or used for more experienced teachers to review their knowledge.

Each module provides basic information in a series of short presentations. Accompanying each section, there is an activity designed to help the teacher or home visitor do the following:

- Reflect on the qualities and beliefs he/she brings to the work
- Problem solve, explore possible alternatives
- Practice skills such as observation

These activities should be reviewed with an education supervisor to promote reflection and ensure understanding.

This module on serving toddlers emphasizes the following:

- How to understand toddlers' sometimes confusing behavior
- How to promote development
- How toddlers work to figure out just who they are
- How toddlers use symbolic thinking in play and language
- Observation and self-reflection skills for home visitors and teachers

Thinking About It... How the Toddler Grows and Develops

Are the twos really terrible? Some people call them the terrific twos!

“No,” “mine,” tantrums, biting, falling, toilet learning, moodiness and “Me do”—no wonder they are sometimes called terrible twos. Language, walking, pretend play, great happiness balancing the great sadness, pure affection—no wonder they’re called the terrific twos.

Some infant-toddler teachers and home visitors love the energy and curiosity of toddlers and 2-year-olds. When a toddler defiantly says “no” to an adult, a sensitive adult, instead of joining the fight, tries to understand and acknowledge the child’s feelings while still drawing the line. “You really don’t want to clean up right now. You sound angry about cleaning up. Let’s do it together so we can go outside faster.”

As a teacher or home visitor, what do you enjoy about this age group? What is hardest for you? Write your thoughts and questions here.

As with any age group, some teachers and home visitors think toddlers are the best to work with; others find them the hardest. Any parent or teacher, however, will sometimes find toddlers tiring and frustrating.

Issues that might arise include the following:

- Appreciating the child’s new abilities with language
- Appreciating the child’s interest in learning
- Enjoying the increasing range of emotional expression
- Taking pleasure in the toddler’s new competence
- Confusion over understanding what toddlers are trying to communicate through their behavior
- Seeing toddlers as defiant, testing, and disrespectful
- Feeling angry over temper tantrums
- Being concerned over parents’ harshness in responding to toddlers

Toddlers learn language and concepts rapidly. They have the physical skills to test many of their ideas about how things work. This time is a lovely period for adults who enjoy children being able to express themselves and spend some time independently. However, so much is happening for toddlers developmentally that they may lose some of their earlier abilities in self-regulation. Difficulties arise over biting, hitting, tantrums, toilet learning, sleeping, eating, and moodiness.

Without immediately jumping to offer solutions to some of these common problems, provide teachers and home visitors time to explore their own feelings about toddlers. This approach is good modeling for staff members who can then listen to families talk about their feelings about this new age group.

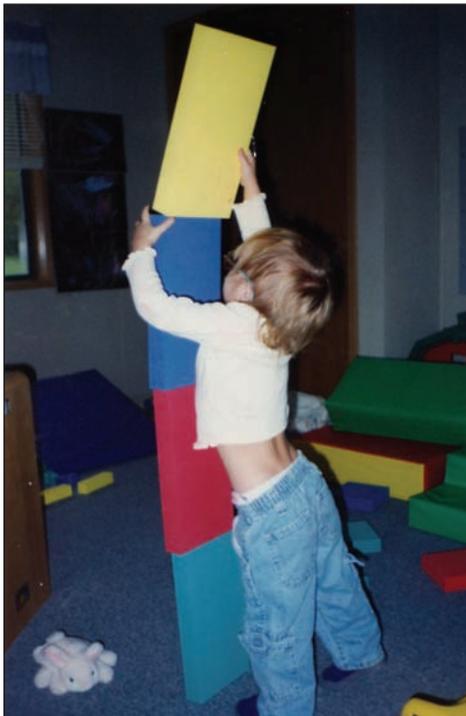
How the Toddler Grows and Develops

Significant changes occur during the toddler period that make it an exciting time for observing and supporting development. New concepts are learned and tested. As the toddler learns about balance and building, she will try new combinations of materials to create taller towers—maybe not minding that they collapse more often than they last. Language, play, friendships, and physical activity all become more complex and sophisticated. As 2-year-olds integrate the symbolic world of language into all of their interactions with the world, their actions increasingly appear to have intentions behind them.

Parents and other trusted adults continue to play a central role in the lives of toddlers. Sometimes it is as a source of nurture and interesting experiences. Sometimes it is as the protector who insists on bedtimes, on eating, on not running there, and on not climbing here. Being responsive to toddlers can be challenging. On Tuesday, the adult refuses the toddler a cookie before lunch, and the toddler pleasantly agrees to wait. On Wednesday, the same interaction results in a full-blown temper tantrum. Toddlers are interesting and exciting, but not always predictable.

This module describes the following:

- Anticipated developmental milestones
- Understanding the meaning of behavior
- Identity formation
- Symbolic play



Thinking About It... The Meaning of Behavior

Try observing a toddler to understand what he or she is thinking, wanting, or trying to accomplish. The first explanations you may think of might include the following:

- He just wants attention.
- She's mean.
- He's selfish.

Now, go a little further in your thinking. Think about these questions:

- Why does he want attention? Am I too busy or distracted to notice what interests him? Does he need the comfort of lap-time as growing bigger offers him challenges?
- Why would such a young child seem mean? Is someone treating her in ways that feel mean? Could I help her learn kinder ways of being with others and still getting what she needs and wants?
- What seems selfish here? Should I be expecting someone this young to share her toys? Maybe at her age she's still only becoming aware of what she wants and feels this minute. Maybe she doesn't even know the other child wants the toy, too.

What other thoughts do you have about these three examples?

It is always important for infant-toddler care staff members to empathize with both the child and the family. Sometimes, however, it is hard to escape the voices of our own childhoods. As babies or toddlers, we may have been seen as having motivations such as being manipulative, seeking attention, and being mean or selfish.

You might want to include these ideas in the conversation:

- Everyone needs attention. Toddlers look to adults for information on whether they are likable, interesting, attractive, lovable, fun, nice to hold, and whether they are “getting it right”—understanding the rules of their family, classroom, and culture.
- Being mean requires some ability to really understand the other person's experience. It would be more helpful to ask: Is she being more forceful than I'm comfortable with? How does she let others know what she needs?
- If identity formation is the major task of the toddler period, then serving the self—or selfishness—is developmentally appropriate. Help staff members keep perspective on different behaviors being developmentally appropriate in different periods of development.

The Meaning of Behavior



Every infant-toddler program is well served by having a protocol to use to support observing and understanding behavior. Regular, ongoing observation and documentation using written descriptions of the sequences of behavior, still photos showing the sequence of behavior, or video are resources that are very helpful in our understanding behavior.

Behavior, as a term, is often used to mean difficult behavior. However, toddlers also communicate their interests, questions about how the world works, and goals through their behavior.

- A toddler might be showing you how hard she is trying to hold an image of her own mother in her mind through the long child-care day as she carries a doll around, nurtures it, and shows her family pictures.

- The photo of the child on page 3 shows a girl figuring out some of the properties of balance and building.
- Two toddlers trying to negotiate the small space available on the stairs to a loft are learning about spatial relationships.

In fact, the behaviors we see as difficult often have positive intentions behind them.

- The young toddler who comes up to another child and hits him may be trying to play, although not very skillfully.
- Sometimes what looks like one child knocking the other over actually began as an attempt to hug.
- Throwing blocks may be an exploration of throwing or a game to a toddler who has no way of knowing his block missiles could hurt his friends.

To help understand what a toddler is trying to say through her actions, try to watch and make note of the following:

- What was happening before the behavior (hitting, crying, or tantrum) began? Who was nearby? What was the toddler trying to do? What else was happening around her?
- See whether describing what you saw seems to catch the toddler's attention. "You were trying to build something very tall before the blocks fell. It made you so mad when they fell!" If this is right, it may either quiet the crying or increase it—but you'll know it rings a bell!
- What happens after the behavior? Does the toddler hold a blankie and suck on a finger or crawl on your lap for help calming? Does she look for someone else to bop? How do you understand it?

Discuss observations with staff members and emphasize the need for empathy for the toddler's perspective and goals as well as for developing strategies for teaching more positive, effective behaviors.

Thinking About It... Developmental Domains, 18 to 24 Months

Tantrums usually appear and reach their height in this period of development. As toddlers become more competent, they try to accomplish more complicated tasks, and they may meet with frustration. They are also becoming more aware of their own desires, likes, and dislikes – and the power adults have to meet or deny their wishes.

When their limited language skills are not up to the job of expressing what they want and when their limited physical skills are not up to completing their goals, toddlers sometimes lose all control and fall to the ground in screaming, crying, rolling around tantrums. Although tantrums can make you angry, it is helpful to remember that the tantrum can be terrifying to the toddler who has lost all control to such a powerful and overwhelming emotion. The toddler needs to know that the adults in his life are not also overpowered by his tantrums.

Here are some ways to provide safety and support during a tantrum:

1. Make sure the toddler cannot hurt himself or others.
2. Stay quietly nearby. You didn't start the tantrum and you can't stop it, but you can show the toddler that you are not frightened by it.
3. When it is over, offer to cuddle and comfort the child. Ask whether there is a way you can help now.
4. If the tantrum was caused by frustration because of something like a tower of blocks falling over, ask whether you can help him in building another tower. However, if it was caused by frustration because you said no to something, do not give in after the tantrum or before long, tantrums will become a tool for getting his own way.

Does your program have a consistent way for all teachers to treat tantrums?

What information do you share with families about tantrums?

The following are some things to remember in discussing tantrums:

- They can be terrifying to the child who fears his own loss of control and his powerful feelings.
- If the adult gives in to the child's requests or demands that caused the tantrum, the child may feel even more frightened by the power of the tantrum.
- A tantrum is usually caused by frustration (the child is trying to do or say something that is beyond his skill level). If tantrums become an effective way to get things (a toy, a turn before anyone else), then the child will use them.
- The intensity and frequency of tantrums may be related to temperament.
- Tantrums usually reach their height at around 21 months and begin to taper off.

The Developmental Domains, 18 to 24 Months



18 to 24 months. The mobile infant was moving with great purpose. The young toddler continues this interest in movement. Although most babies are walking before 18 months, the particular gait they use in this period has given the age group the name “toddler.” They walk and fall. They run and fall. They get up and keep going and do not seem to have to think about their bodies quite as much.

Toddlers become much more intentional in their play and in their use of materials than do mobile infants. They are likely to spend more time using art and sensory materials. Following an ant on a sidewalk or a leaf blowing in the wind can be fascinating and joyous.

The toddler does not always need an adult at his side, but he still needs an adult within visual contact. The toddler may bring a ball or a stick to a teacher and ask just what this is or try to tell the adult about it, using a mixture of gestures, jabbering, and words.

Toddlers need time for their play. Toddlers like to be in control of their own attention and follow their interests. They are discovering the world from a new vantage point, and they need time to take things in. A toddler who is running back and forth joyfully may stop, standing completely still when he hears the sound of an airplane, and follow it across the sky with his eyes. When it is gone, he may turn to his teacher and excitedly say, “A-hay, a-hay!”

Words are clearly power to the toddler, and adults need to provide a rich language environment. Showing toddlers their own names in writing helps them understand the symbols of written language. Books with realistic photos or pictures that demonstrate colors or shapes can be very interesting.

Young toddlers may spontaneously gather around a teacher who is reading a storybook, but they are still too young to be required to participate in a “circle time” or other group story times. Planning and activities should continue to be individualized.

Friendships and prosocial behaviors can be encouraged as children are able to follow others. Simple imitation of facial expressions or actions may turn into follow-the-leader games.

Teachers and home visitors need to understand and celebrate the changes and accomplishments of this busy period of development.

Thinking About It...

Developmental Domains, 24 to 36 Months

This age is a wonderful time for observing kindness among children. Watch children during socializations or in group care. Observe and note the times you see gentle touching, the offering of comfort to a crying child, or toddlers playing cooperatively.

- Take photos or write down what you are seeing.
- Does kindness occur more often than you expected?
- How can you promote more acts of kindness among toddlers?

This module has many activities to promote self-reflection and observation skills for teachers and home visitors. Toddlers are known for their dramatic outbursts. It is helpful for teachers and home visitors to be able to stay calm and take the time to understand what the toddler is trying to accomplish—and how easily her own goals can lead to her own emotional undoing!

One helpful skill for all teachers is the ability to look for the positive. Toddlers often demonstrate acts of empathy and kindness. The same toddler who has just bitten a peer may comfort that child with touching or even trying to kiss the spot that is hurt.

Suggested Learning Activities

- Ask teachers to document observed acts of kindness. See whether they can recount what preceded and followed these acts. Do all of the children demonstrate kindness? Some more than others?
- In discussion, list many ways toddlers can or might express kindness.
- Share photo documentation of demonstrations of kindness for the group to analyze, if you are able to.

The Developmental Domains, 24 to 36 Months



24 to 36 months. Two-year-olds have impressive physical capacities. They can move from place to place on their own, not just walking but running, climbing, and jumping. They help dress themselves, feed themselves, and are learning about toileting. They carry things from one place to another and can help put away toys or set the table—if it is within reach.

Two-year-olds increase language skills and use them to express what they did, what they want, and what they think. Language becomes a part of play as they direct their friends or pretend to drive trucks or feed babies. They are likely to use words such as *me*, *mine*, or *I do it!* that support their growing sense of self. Programs may need to talk about this period of development with families from cultures that value interdependence and determine together how to work with this milestone in development.

These new words help adults see some big changes that are happening in 2-year-olds. As they become increasingly aware of their own thoughts and feelings, they are also becoming more aware of the thoughts and feelings of others. If a friend is crying, a 2-year-old might try touching her friend, hugging him, or bringing him a bandage. She may offer her own “lovey” or, showing this new awareness of other people’s thinking, may hunt out that child’s favorite blanket or toy and bring it to him.

Two-year-olds love pictures of the important people in their lives. Their play is likely to imitate many of the things they see their parents and teachers doing. Friendships are being established. Two-year-olds enjoy playing the same games over and over with the same friends. These games may involve chase, imitation, or pretend play such as going to the store or fixing the car.

Increased language skills help 2-year-olds work together to solve a problem or to build a creation. Most 2-year-olds are still too young for structured group activities, but they may choose to stay together and organize their own group activities. This period is a good time to offer activities that may be used in a group, for example, painting together on large rolls of paper or using a variety of balls that can be thrown into or carried around in plastic laundry baskets.

*Thinking About It...
Identity Formation: The Big Idea in the Toddler's
Development—You...and Me*



This father and son clearly have a comfortable relationship. Notice the respect shown by the father as he holds, talks to, and gestures for the child.

List messages that this child may be receiving about how he is seen by his father.

How might these messages affect this boy's idea about who he is?

Suggested Learning Activities

If it feels safe and comfortable, ask teachers and home visitors to reflect on the messages, both positive and negative, that they internalized during their early years. What did they see or hear that gave those messages?

Discuss a child who is recognized as challenging by a teacher. Are there ways to reframe descriptions of the child? Instead of "He's mean," would it be equally true

to say "He really knows what he wants?" Could a child's behavior change positively with an admiring adult who sets limits firmly and kindly?

Is there a parent or family member whose attitude toward a child may be providing distressing messages? For example, do the staff members ever hear comments such as "He's just like his father!" when the staff members know that the father left the mother during the pregnancy?

Identity Formation: The Big Idea in the Toddler's Development—You...and Me



Most adults have some understanding that their sense of self and their sense of identity were somehow formed within their early relationships. However, that knowledge does not always keep them sensitive to how their responses to young children may shape their identities.

Infants and toddlers incorporate what they see and hear others doing as how they should behave. They watch important adults in interactions and learn how they and others should be treated. They attend to how adults express emotions in different situations and learn how they should feel (Lally, 1995).

The smallest interactions between an adult and a toddler can have enormous effect on the child's idea of who she is. Does the adult respect the toddler's feelings? If a toddler cries easily, does the teacher or parent get annoyed and dismiss the child as a "crybaby?" Or does the adult see this behavior as an opportunity to acknowledge the child's feelings, provide comfort, and help the child find language to use in the situation?

By the time a child reaches the age of 2 years, parents, home visitors, and teachers may well have stereotyped opinions of the child. "He's sweet." "She's stubborn." "He likes to hurt people." "She's very sensitive." "He is very smart." "She's not very pretty." No, the adults may not say these things to the children, but they will communicate their opinions through each moment-to-moment interaction. These communications could have lasting effects.

The attention paid to the child's interests supports the child's sense of himself as a learner. Sitting back and admiring the toddler's efforts in climbing, jumping, and sliding communicates a sense of confidence in the toddler's ability to take risks. Listening to jabber or attempts at sentences and responding with warm, accepting language tells the toddler that what she has to say is important and meaningful.

Culture is incorporated into a child's identity. The child who is always rewarded for sharing and generosity is learning about the cooperative nature of her culture. The child who is rewarded for personal accomplishments is learning about achievement and independence as values of her culture.

The task for the teacher or home visitor is to reflect on his or her own feelings for the child and to help the family to do the same. We sometimes see attitudes or hear comments that we know are sending the child a bad message about him- or herself. Addressing those issues can be difficult.

Every moment of interest, respect, and affection is an investment in the child's sense of self. Every encouragement to learn, explore, and play tells the child that he is a learner. Infant-toddler programs provide a positive emotional environment as a foundation for strong identity formation.

Thinking About It...

Symbolic Play

As you spend time in home visits, socializations, or in the classroom, watch for moments of imitative and pretend play. Write down what you see.

- Does the same play get repeated over and over?
- What causes it to change?
- Do children with more language have play with more involved stories?
- Does play have more people and events as children get older?
- How can you support imitative and pretend play?

Symbolic or pretend play is often repetitive. Younger toddlers may put their heads down and say “Night, night” and then immediately pop up saying “Morning!” over and over again. This endless repetition is enjoyable to the young toddler, and it is also a sign of limited ability to extend the game. Often, an older child or an adult may cause the play to change by offering an elaboration, “Let’s put teddy bear to sleep now, and maybe you could cook him some breakfast when he wakes up. What does Teddy like for breakfast?” The play may involve shopping, cooking, setting the table, waking Teddy, and feeding him.

Language helps play become more elaborate, and it is a sign that the child’s thinking is developing so he is capable of more complex play. Play becomes more complex as the child’s language becomes more complex. Children with hearing impairments, speech delays, visual impairments, or other disabilities may need specialized support for their participation in play and to make their play more complex.

Suggested Learning Activities

- Let a small group of teachers and home visitors review one or more of the observations and brainstorm ways to support the play. Ideas might include offering ideas, adding props, becoming a character in the play, and adding or expanding language to the play.
- Teachers and home visitors could practice ways to support play in role plays.
- Teachers and home visitors could observe children with a supervisor trying elaborations in the moment, then discussing what seemed to work.

Symbolic Play



The most significant developmental accomplishment of the toddler years is the child's new ability to form mental images and hold them in his mind. He can now do the following:

- Use words to communicate needs, ideas, feelings, and memories
- Pretend that one object is really another, for example, a block that may be a telephone, a car, a house, a lake or anything else that fits in the story of the child's play
- Understand that his own preferences and thoughts may not be the same as those experienced by others
- Imagine that things could be different than how they really are

The ability to use symbols such as words or play objects represents a whole new way that children interact with their world. Toddler symbolic play is related to the development of language. Both play and language mark a major shift in the toddler's thinking.

Using both language and play, toddlers begin to develop stories. As adults, we organize much of our thinking about ourselves and our lives in our own stories. Toddlers begin to be able to tell you what happened yesterday "Doggie barked me" or what will happen tomorrow "Gamma come my house." They will also tell you through their play many of the things that happen in their lives. A child who lives in a violent home may yell at and hit her baby doll. Or she may show what she wishes for as she treats her baby doll with exaggerated sweetness and caring.

The use of symbols releases the toddler from the largely concrete world of infant cognition into the realm of imagination. Symbolic play begins in a simple, imitative, concrete manner. A baby lifts an empty cup and pretends to drink from it. After a while, she pretends to give a doll a drink from the cup. The toddler further expands play as she places the doll into a small shopping cart and parades around the room "grocery shopping." Other toddlers may join her story as she pays them for her groceries. As toddlers come closer to their third birthdays, they are likely to expand their play by using costumes, clothing, hats, or props to become firemen, nurses, doctors, and dancers or to take on other roles.

Adults are very important partners to toddlers in increasing the complexity of symbolic play. Adults sometimes add new ideas to the play. For example, if a child is repeatedly feeding a doll, an adult may say, "Your baby looks so tired. How do you put him down for a nap?" This question may begin a whole new part of the story, with diaper changes, wrapping in a blanket, singing a lullaby, or creating a space for sleeping. Adults may also offer to help toddlers manage strong feelings in their play. The child described above as screaming at her baby in play may feel very well understood if the adult says, "I think the baby is frightened when her mama yells. Maybe we could cuddle together with your baby."

Related Head Start Program Performance Standards

- 1304.20(f)—Individualization of the program
- 1304.21(a)(1)(i) (ii) (iii) (iv)—Child development and education approach for all children
- 1304.21(a)(2)(i) (ii)—Parents
- 1304.21(a)(3)(i)(A) (B) (C) (D) (E)—Support social and emotional development
- 1304.21(a)(3)(ii)—Planning for routines and transitions
- 1304.21(a)(4)(i) (ii) (iii) (iv)—Each child’s cognitive and language skills
- 1304.21(a)(5)(i) (ii) (iii) (6)—Physical development
- 1304.21(b)(1)(i) (ii) (iii)—Child development and education approach for infants and toddlers
- 1304.21(b)(2)(i) (ii)—Social and emotional development of infants and toddlers
- 1304.21(b)(3)(i) (ii)—Physical development of infants and toddlers
- 1304.24(a)(1)(i) (ii) (iii) (iv)—Grantee and delegate agencies must work collaboratively with parents
- 1304.40(e)(1) (2) (3)—Parent involvement in child development and education
- 1306.23(a) (b)—Training

References

- Lally, J. R. (1995). The impact of child care policies and practices on infant/toddler identity formation. *Young Children*, 51(1), 58–67.